

A WEEK-END WITH FARRINGATE

Drawing by J. V. McFall

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

I HAD been detained unexpectedly in town one supercilious day in mid-July on a little business affair that required my personal attention, and on the completion of my work at the office had gone to the club for dinner. As I entered the dining room the first thing to catch my eye was my old friend Billie Farrington, seated by one of the small tables over by the window, enjoying a period of joyous communion with a cold broiled lobster, which he was washing down with copious drafts of iced tea.

"How's His Royal Highness this evening?" I observed as I paused at his table, half hoping for an invitation to sit down and join him for if there is anything in the world that I despise it is eating alone. And, by the way, I should explain that we all referred to Farrington as "his Royal Highness" because of his remarkable likeness to the Van Dyke portrait of Charles I., his beard, bearing, and generally aristocratic contour of face making the resemblance almost startling.

"His Majesty is feeling pretty fit," he replied, with a hearty handshake, "but a trifle lonesome. He misses the loyal attendance of his followers."

"That can be easily remedied," I ventured.

"So be it," said Farrington "but as three is an awkward number, let me order another lobster, and we'll have a little *partie carrée*."

I was quick to avail myself of the proffered hospitality. Another lobster was ordered, and it was not long before the four of us were busily occupied with one another, Farrington having with rare self-restraint paused in the consumption of his own particular crustacean until mine was served.

"Whom do you suppose I saw last night, Jack?" Farrington suddenly blurted out, after he had discussed with the waiter the desirability of finishing off his repast with raspberries and cream or Canadian melon.

"Well," said I, grinning over a particularly luscious and meaty claw, "if your evening meal is generally made up of broiled lobster and raspberries and cream, I shouldn't be surprised if you'd seen old Father Noah, or Methuselah, or possibly Sitting Bull. Such a combination would seem to me to be conducive to almost any kind of vision."

Farrington laughed. "That's why I indulge myself in such rare combinations," he said. "I can't tell you what joyous picnics I have had with the illustrious of other days, based upon my devotion to lobster and Canadian melon. I've had personal interviews with Julius Caesar, Captain Kidd, old Bill Shakespeare, and Lucius Borgia time and time and again; but it wasn't a dietary vision this time; it was the real thing. I saw Bobby Faxon."

"Really?" I cried. "Well, I declare! Good old Bobby Faxon, eh? Why, I don't believe I've seen Bobby since the old Blue Haven days. Where on earth did you dig him up?"

"He's in vaudeville," said Farrington. "I found time hanging rather heavy on my hands last night, so I dropped into the Varieties along about nine o'clock, and who should turn up as the hero of a clever little one-act farce of his own writing but dear old Bobby himself? He's what they call a tophener."

"I knew Bob had gone on the stage," said I; "but I thought he had made a failure of it, poor boy. He dropped out of sight long ago. He was a fine fellow, Faxon was, I went on; but it never struck me that he knew how to act."

"And there's where there's another strike coming to you," retorted Farrington, with a surprising show of enthusiasm for him. "He was fine in this little play last night, though to tell the truth I knew him the minute he came on the stage."

"Why shouldn't you?" said I. "I presume you had a program with his name on it."

"True," said Farrington; "but Bobby isn't known as Bobby Faxon to the profane; he is none other than the famous Harley Ruxton, whose name and fame are on the lips of all men from one end of Broadway to the other. If you haven't anything else on for tonight, I move we go over and call on him."

"Delighted!" said I. "I've always had a soft spot in my heart for Bobby, and it will be a joy to grip his old fist once more."

SO it happened that an hour later Farrington and I occupied box seats on the roof of the Varieties and to tell the truth were more than pleased with our old friend's work. There wasn't any doubt about his being



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Bobby Faxon. No such thin disguise as a high-sounding name like Harley Ruxton could conceal that fact from us, and when the drop fell on the last scene of his farce Farrington and I sent our cards around to him by one of the ushers, offering to lay our tribute of a Welsh rabbit upon the altar of his genius if he would join us at the club. The usher soon returned with word that Mr. Ruxton would be with us shortly; as soon, in fact, as he could divest himself of his makeup and appear in the habiliments of real life.

When he appeared he seemed to be as glad to see us as we were to see him; but later on when we were seated in the club grille enjoying the rabbit we discovered that even the joys of an unexpected reunion could not salve a raw spot in his professional pride.

"I'm mighty glad to see you boys again—mighty glad," he said; "but, by George! I must be a pretty hum sort of actor to be spotted at first glance by two men who haven't seen me for fifteen years! If a man can't submerge his own personality in an impersonation better than that—"

"Oh, none of 'em can, Bobby," said I. "I've seen the best men the stage has produced in my day, and as I began to go to the theater young it has been a pretty long day at that, and you can take it from me that an actor cannot conceal his own personal earmarks any more than a camel can conceal its hump. Even Booth, great as he was, was always Booth. Irving was never able to shake Irving, and anybody who'd ever seen Barrie's 'Little Minister' played in this country knew mighty well that the Chantecler was no Rooster, nice little bantam though he appeared. You're Bobby Faxon, and you'll never be anything else but Bobby Faxon, whether you hide your manly form under a pillow and try to make us think you are Falstaff, or clothe yourself in rags and come before us as a Scarecrow."

"I knew you the minute you came on the stage," said Farrington, "and that's going some for a man who hasn't seen hide nor hair of you since the Spanish War."

"Yes, it is," said Faxon. "I'm afraid I'm a failure."

"Nonsense, Bob!" said I. "On the contrary, you're great—only you can't fool your Uncle Jack, or his Royal Highness King Charles the First."

Faxon looked curiously at Farrington as I spoke, and then he smiled. "I've been wondering all along who it was Billie was impersonating," he said. "I had about decided that he was wearing the makeup of one of those old Florentine Cardinals; but now I see. How is your Majesty's sore throat this evening?" he added, with a touch of his oldtime whimsical humor.

It was not until the wee sma' hours of the morning were beginning to wax into figures of respectable size that our little meeting broke up, and both Farrington and I were enthralled by Faxon's story of his adventures since the days when we had been happy, carefree

college boys together. The man had seen a deal of hardship, and had run pretty nearly the whole gamut of life from failure to success, and from success back again. He had visited about all the English speaking countries of the world, and one could almost have made a book of the adventures he had been through and so vividly portrayed to us that night before we parted.

"Out in the provinces," he said, with a satisfied little shake of his head, "they think I'm some actor; but here in this sophisticated old burg I'm no better than the rest of them if I cannot hide my identity any better than I seem to have done tonight."

"Still harping on my daughter, Bobby?" said I. "Drop it, old man. Treat it to the dull, sickening thud. You forget how well we boys knew you. Maybe that accounts for it. You have earmarks that you can't get away from, as far as we are concerned; and even if you could, I am a firm believer in the instincts of friendship. When a man cares as much for another fellow as Farrington and I have cared—and, by George! still do care—for you, why, even if you were able to deceive our eyes and ears, you couldn't hope to escape the inner perception of the spirit that would spot you every time."

WE parted soon after this, having made a vow that never again should we permit so long a time to elapse between our meetings as had kept us separated since our college days. The next day I managed to clean up the work that had held me so happily in town, and returned to my home on Long Island; where, without forgetting the joys of that reunion, I soon found myself so completely absorbed in other things that Faxon for a time ceased to obsess my thoughts. One Saturday afternoon, however, about two weeks later, I was summoned to my 'phone by a long distance call from New York.

"That you, Jack?" said Farrington's voice over the wire.

"Yes," said I. "Glad to hear from you again. What's up, Billie?"

"Oh, nothing much," he replied. "Only the town's kind of lonesome over Sunday, and I thought I'd like to run over to your place tomorrow and spend the day with you. I feel as if I could do you on the links."

"Bully!" said I. "Come along. There's a four-fifteen from the Pennsylvania terminal this afternoon. If you can get that, I'll meet you at the station."

"Can't work it, Jack," said he. "I've got a date with Faxon."

"Fine!" said I. "Bring him along."

"That's impossible," said Farrington. "He's got to be here in town for his turn at the Varieties tonight."

"All right, then," said I. "We'll look for you on the eight-thirty tomorrow morning. If Bobby feels like joining us, he'll be mighty welcome."

"I've suggested that to him already," said Farrington;